

[The Coming of Machines]

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Section #8

Page 1 THE COMING OF MACHINES

"I always liked ta cut shoes by hand better'n by machine fur two reasons. First, we got one third more pay fur hand cuttin'. An' we wuz in it fur what we could get outa it. Then another reason wuz that ya kin distinguish the stock better in hand cuttin' than ya kin in machine cuttin'. When ya put the dye down in machine cuttin' ya can't see the stock as well but when ya cut by hand, ya kin see jest what part a the shoe ta put the good leather in, and where it won't matter if the leather ain't up ta par. Shoe Shops

"In hand cuttin', ya put the pattern on the leather, and cut around it with a knife. " The first machines fur cuttin' uppers come in about [40?] years ago but they wuz only used fur the standard shoes— then them that din't change their styles fur a good many years. The dyes cost too much ta buy jest fur a style a shoes that changed every season ; or That's why there's still hand cuttin' [;?] the dyes cost too much ta buy 'em fur styles that change two, three times a season. That's why there's [?] 2 still hand cuttin'; the dyes cost too much ta buy 'em fur styles that change two, three times a season. Then too , as I said before, a ya can't cut shoes as skillful by machine as ya kin by hand. " The machines ta dink out soles with, come in before them I jest spoke of. That's because the soles are

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more standard than the uppers an' ya kin use a dye longer. The upper machines has had a lotta improvements since they wuz first used too, same as the other machines in the shops. "The other machines in the shops come in before the cuttin' machines. [?] Time a the Ironclad strike in the '70s there wuz the buffin' machine, the McKay stitchin' machine, the heelin' machine, the beatin' out machine, the edgesettin' machine and the machine that shined the shoes, called the Tapley Burnisher. " Some a 'em wuz rented by the company and some of 'em wuz bought outright. Taday all the machinery in a factory is rented from the United Shoe Machinery Corporation. They got a monopoly on it.

"The machines are a lot diffrent from what they wuz in the '70s. The buffin' machine had a pipe outa a windah so that the dust would go outside 'stead a droppin' in the shop. Never wuz a shop in them days but had that big pipe comin' outa a winda shootin' the dirt all 'roun. 3 " The scrap leather wuz most always throwed out the winda in a big pile in them days too, 'cept them pieces that wuz big enough ta make babies' shoes from. " Some folk'd come and get some of them scraps from the pile and burn 'em in the furnace. I knowed one woman kept a house full a boarders warm all winter on scraps a shoe leather.

"That wuz stopped though when the Jewish junk dealers found they could make money on scrap leather. They started ta buy it and ta sell it ta concerns that made diffrent uses a it. Some usta bury it and get chemicals outa it in that way. " Fore the machinery come in sa strong, we din't get sech high pay, but we wuz sure a our jobs. But after 1900 the machines wuz comin' in more'n more. And during the World War, when a lotta men went ta war, and the demand fur shoes wuz sa great, the machines come in strong. Then when the men come back again, there wuz plenty a shoe help and not enough jobs. Because the machinery kept right on doin' the work that the men done before and there wuz no way a pushin' the machines out and gettin' the men back.

"Taday everything is set so as ta make it easy fur a man ta make a lotta shoes quicker'n they made 'em in my day. Good machines and good light. [?]

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"We usta work by oil lamps. We'd start in the 4 mornin' before the light wuz good and offen we'd work 'till after dark in the winter time. We'd have a lamp settin' at each end of our cuttin' table.

"There'd be oil lamps strapped ta the stitchin' machines too. After that they had gas jets ta work with[,?] and today they have electric lights on dark days when they don't get enough light from outside. 5 [?] DEPARTMENTS AND FAULTY WORK " Each group that worked in a shop wuz sorta like a part of one of them picture puzzles that are out apart and havta be fitted together. If one group din't stand up, ya coun't make a shoe.

"Maybe the most important part a that puzzle wuz the cutters. Fur not only did they decide, by the kinda work they did, what kinda shoe it'd be, but after they done their part a the work, the manufacturer'd know jest how much the shoe'd cost. Before that he'd woun't know how much material it'd cost him. He could always figger on the cost a labor ahead a time, but he coun't be sure about the cost of material, 'till the cutter wuz through his work. All the rest a makin a shoe is labor, that is outside a the thread a stitcher uses an' glue an' nails an' such. Them things are easy ta guess at. But not leather.

"Ya see, sometimes, a piece a leather would have a bad spot in it. An sometimes the color would not all be the same. Coun't figure on them things.

"It wuz up ta the cutter, ta do the best he could on the material he got. If he din't he soon lost his job. If it cost me ten cents a day more'n it cost 6 the other fellas, I'd get fired.

"If there wuz a scratch on the leather, I wuz usin' and I'd put that scratch on the shoe, that pair'd come back ta me, and I'd havta pay fur it. So ya see we had ta know our business, if we wanted ta earn a good week's pay. If any other person'd make a mistake so as they couldn't sell the shoe, they'd havta pay fur it too.

When I first started cuttin' shoes, they wuzn't sa strict about that unless ya wuz real careless 'bout your work. But later on, all the manufacturers made ya pay fur a shoe if ya

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was anyways responsible fur spoilin' it so it woun't sell. Competition got sa strong they had ta if they wuz ta make a profit and pay good wages.

“Sometimes we'd find a person could wear 'em, an we'd sell 'em to them cheap. Then later on there'd be an agent come aroun' buyin' em, at say about twenty-five cents less'n we paid fur 'em, an' so we'd not lose sa much as if they wuz all loss. But we'd be pretty careful not to spoil any more'n we could help.

“A course the manufacturer coun't make ya pay fur that shoe by law, cause if ya'd take it inta court, the judge'd ask ya, 'did ya ruin' that shoe wilful?' A course ya din't, so that judged dismiss the case.

“But ya coun't do that, 'cause ya'd lose your job. It wuz much cheaper ta pay fur the shoe.
7 “But we cutters that knowed our business din't cut many shoes that'd come back ta us ta pay fur. We'd know the diffrunt kinds a skins ant jest how ta cut 'em so as ta make 'em look right an' wear good. We could tell the diffrunt kinds a leather from the feel a it, say kangaroo, goat, cowhide an' all the other kinds.

“If any person'd make a bad mistake so as ta spoil a shoe in any other department, they'd have ta pay fur it too.

“But ya take a tag girl now, if she taged a whole case wrong, ya coun't make her pay fur all them shoes. That'd be more'n she'd earn. She'd jest have ta pay some a what the mistake cost, not the whole thing.”

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